

Capstone Requirements

Description

The objective of the capstone course is to provide an environment in which students integrate, synthesize and apply the knowledge, skills, and perspectives acquired in the MPA or MA core curriculum to a real world public policy or management problem. The capstone course is a professional experience inside the classroom intended to sharpen problem solving, analytic, and communications skills. By applying theory to practice, the capstone experience serves as an important bridge between the classroom and the professional world.

Objectives

The active use and integration of material from core courses in public policy, public sector economics, public management, and decision support and quantitative methods in the capstone project informs issues faced by public policy analysts and managers. The course also prepares students to critically assess public policy and management analyses and prepares students to produce their own analysis that informs a real world policy or management issue. In preparing the project deliverables, students will be expected to produce high-quality policy or management analysis while operating under tight deadlines.

Components of the Capstone Project

I. Define the Problem, Identify Goals and Objectives, and Assemble Evidence

- A. Clearly define the problem using evidence to assess the nature and extent of the problem
- B. Assess previous efforts to solve problem
- C. Define goals and objectives
- D. Identify and describe relevant stakeholders
- E. Identify and describe analysis strategies

II. Construct and Analyze Alternatives

- A. Identify and describe alternatives
- B. Systematically compare alternatives, specifying choice criteria
- C. Identify and describe relevant spillovers and externalities associated with alternatives
- D. Identify and describe tradeoffs

III. Decide, Conclude, and Recommend

- A. Describe the preferred alternative
- B. State conclusions
- C. Specify political, organizational, and economic conditions that will affect successful implementation of your choice
- D. Summarize the monitoring and/or evaluation plan

Final project deliverables will include both a written document and an oral presentation.

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Course Requirements

Students are required to earn a grade of “B” or better to successfully fulfill the capstone requirement, which is necessary to graduate from both the MA and MPA programs. Students with a grade lower than B or an incomplete will be required to take a second capstone course. A student has only two chances to achieve a grade of “B” or better in the capstone course. Regardless of grade, students who take an Incomplete in the course are considered not to have successfully fulfilled the capstone requirement and will be required to take a second capstone class.

When to take the capstone:

Typically, MPA students will take in the class in their final semester, although exceptions may be made to allow MPA students to take the class in the semester prior to graduating. MA students are required to take the capstone course in the semester in which they intend to graduate.

Options

Students are encouraged to take capstone classes which focus on a particular topic related to their interests. However, they also have the option of registering for the 7900 Capstone Research Paper in Public Affairs class, in which students may work independently on a topic of their own choosing. Students opting to enroll in the 7900 class must submit for approval the following items at least six weeks prior to the start of the semester (or prior to the end of the Spring semester for students graduating in Autumn) in which they will enroll in the class.

The short proposal should contain the following:

- 1) The proposed topic
- 2) Preliminary research questions
- 3) Specific data sources, and
- 4) A preliminary reading list

Capstone Assessment

Approximately halfway into the semester (dates to be announced prior to the start of the academic year), all students will be required to complete this graded take-home assessment, which will comprise 30% of the grade for the course. It is intended to test a student’s ability to integrate the knowledge and skills gained throughout her or his graduate program and apply it to practice. While students may be working in groups on their capstone projects, collaboration with other students on this assessment is strictly prohibited. The exact wording of the assessment will be provided to students preferably in the syllabus, but no later than two weeks prior to the due date. The questions can be tailored to the specific capstone sections as appropriate and will take the following general form:

- 1) Clearly define the problem addressed by your capstone project. What evidence is there that this is a significant problem worthy of our attention? Who are the relevant stakeholders and what are their roles? Also, identify any previous policy or management efforts to address the problem.
- 2) Critically assess previous evaluations of the same or similar topic. Components of this assessment should include design, data, statistical methods, internal and external validity, and the counterfactual.

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- 3) Discuss how you plan to address the problem. Why are you choosing this approach, and why is this preferred over other approaches you examined? Further, discuss the rationale for the outcome measures you have chosen.
- 4) Discuss the policy or managerial alternatives you are examining. What are the specific criteria you will use to compare the alternatives?
- 5) Thinking about your recommendations (or choose one of the possible recommendations if you are not yet ready to make a recommendation), address possible spillovers and the political, organizational, legal, and economic conditions that may affect the successful implementation of your choice.

MA Students

The Capstone Assessment will also constitute the University's required master's examination for the Master of Arts degree. The Capstone Assessment Committee is approved by the College's director and includes at least one core College faculty member plus the instructor of the class, provided that the instructor is a member of the Graduate Faculty of M level or higher. In the event that the instructor is not a graduate faculty member of M level or higher, the instructor may be added to the committee by approval of the graduate studies committee and petition to the Graduate College. While the instructor assigns the grade for the assignment as part of the grade for the course, the Capstone Assessment Committee evaluates separately whether the student achieves a successful pass ("Pass" or "Marginal Pass"). Students who fail will be required to stand for an oral examination with the assessment committee, during which they will have the opportunity to expand further on their answers to the written assessment. This should take place immediately (i.e. a day or two) after the committee has determined that the written assessment is insufficient. At the oral examination, the advisor serves as the chair and all members of the assessment committee must be present. MA students failing the oral examination will be required to take a second capstone class in a future semester and also successfully pass the Capstone Assessment. An MA student has only two chances to pass the Capstone Assessment. Students passing the assessment but failing to achieve a "B" or higher in the course will be required to take another capstone class. Both criteria ("B" in the course and passing the assessment) are required to graduate.

MPA Students

For MPA students, the completion of a capstone class with a grade of "B" or higher satisfies the College's capstone exit requirement for the Master of Public Administration degree. All other degree requirements must also be successfully met in order to graduate (See Master's Handbook for full requirements.)

Dual Degree Students

Dual degree students should consult their advisors in both programs early on to determine the exit requirements specific to their plans of study. All dual MA students will be required to take their exam during the final semester of their program with the Glenn College.

The [Capstone Project Archive](#) provides examples of previously completed Capstone Projects.